A LEISURE HOUR'S READING

GENTLE INFLUENCES.

Violets, in the leafiest shade,
By their odors are betrayed;
Soft winds, over flowery fields blown,
By their fragrant breath are known;
Dew, by freshened leaves confessed,
Wets unseen Earth's slumbering breast;
Rills, from out the high hill side,
Swell to rivers deep and wide;
Rivers, flowing fast and free,
Widen to the boundless Sea;
All great things that move the Earth,
To gentle issues owe their birth;
And soft influence still is best,
Bringing comfort, love, and rest.
Sweet domestic love is strong—
Leads to Right and warns from Wrong;
Kindly whisper, mightier prove,
And to loftier action move,
Than the fretful voice of Scorn,
Of Contempt and Anger born.

Chambers' Journal.

LINCOLN'S FIRST LOVE.

To the Editor of the St. Joseph (Mo.) Gazette—In the *Gazette* of yesterday appears an article, copied from the Chicago *Inter-Ocean*, entitled "Abraham Lincoln's Love," in which occur some errors that I am tempted to try to correct. The article referred to purports to be an interview with W. G. Greene, with whom I am well acquainted, in which a history of Mr. Lincoln's courtship with Mary Owens is given. The Mary Owens referred to in the interview, and who, in 1840, married Jesse Vineyard, was my mother, and while I am not at all certain that it is best for me to say anything, yet, as the language attributed to her is such that no woman of my mother's education could have used, and as there is evidently a mistake with reference to her engagement with the ex-President, I have concluded to send you this communication for publication. I am persuaded that the correspondent of the Chicago *Inter-Ocean* has not correctly reported his interview with Mr. Greene, so far as correctly expressing the replies made by Mary Owens to Abraham Lincoln. Mr Greene is a gentleman of excellent sense and judgement, and I know his appreciation of my mother and her attainments to be such that he would not have attributed to her language even bordering on illiteracy. In a communication to a biographer of Mr Lincoln, when a description of Mary Owens was sought for publication, Mr. Greene says of her: "She was tall, weighed 121 pounds, and had large blue eyes, with the finest trimmings I ever saw. She was jovial, social, loved wit and humor, had a liberal education, and was considered wealthy. I am getting old; have seen too much trouble to give a life like picture of this woman. I won't try it. None of the poets or romance writers have ever given us a picture of a heroine so beautiful as a good description of Miss Owens in 1838 would be." Another member of Mr. Greene's family, writing to the same biographer, speaks of her as "very intellectual—the most intellectual woman he ever saw." I will be pardoned for having referred to these opinions to show that, whatever Mary Owens, who died in 1877, said to Lincoln, she probably addressed him in good English, and Mr. Greene is doubtless incorrectly reported in this particular.

But the real purpose of this communication is to correct the mistake in the article to which reference has been made, so far as it relates to the engagement of Mr. Lincoln. I often heard my mother speak before her death of her acquaintance with this man, who subsequently became so distinguished. She always spoke of him as a man of the kindest feelings and the most generous impulses. She said that she learned upon one occasion, when Mr. Lincoln was crossing a prairie, he came to where a hog was mired down. He had on his best suit of clothes, and resolved at first that he would pass by without helping the struggling animal out. But when he had gone a little way he looked back, and the poor creature seemed to say, "There, now, my last hope is gone." He could steel his heart no longer, but got down and released the floundering animal from its difficulty, and then went on his way with soiled hands and clothes. She also spoke of him as a man of fine common sense. But though she admired the man for his many sterling qualities of head and heart, yet in person and gait he was so awkward and ungainly, and in the nicer and more delicate attentions of man to woman he was so defective, that she could not love him.

It was in 1836, while Mary Owens was visiting a sister of hers in Menard County, Ill., that Mr. Lincoln became acquainted with her, and finally, in 1837, he offered her his hand and heart in marriage. He presented his suit with a frankness and candor and with a sincerity of purpose that was characteristic of the man. Shortly after making this proposal, and after an intimation that his suit would probably be unavailing, Mr. Lincoln went to Springfield, Ill., as a member of the Legislature of that State, from whence he wrote Mary Owens a letter, dated May 7, 1837, which letter and others from the same writer are still among the papers belonging to the estate of my mother. A part of that letter reads as follows:

"Whatever woman casts her lot with mine, should any ever do so, it is my intention to do all in my power to make her happy and contented; and there is nothing I can imagine that would make me more unhappy than to fail in the effort. I know I would be much happier with you than the way I am, provided I saw no signs of discontent in you. What you have said to me may have been in the way of a jest, or I may have misunderstood it: If so, then let it be forgotten; if otherwise, I much wish you would think seriously before you decide. For my part, I have already decided. What I have said I will most positively abide by, provided you wish it. My opinion is that you had better do it. You have not been accustomed to hardships, and it may be more severe than you now imagine. I know that you are capable of thinking correctly on any subject, and if you deliberate maturely on this before you finally decide, then I am willing to abide by your decision."

After Mr. Lincoln's offer of marriage had been declined, under date of Aug. 16, 1837, he again wrote to Mary Owens, as follows:

"You will no doubt think it strange that I should write you a letter on the same day on which we parted; and I can only account for it by supposing that seeing you lately makes me think of you more than usual; while at our late meeting we had but few expressions of thoughts. You must know that I cannot see you or think of you with indifference; and yet it may be that you are mistaken in regard to what my real feelings toward you are. If I knew you were not I should not trouble you with this letter. Perhaps any other man would know enough without further information; but I consider it my peculiar right to plead ignorance, and your bounden duty to allow the plea. I want in all cases to do right, and most particularly in all cases with women. I want at this particular time, more than anything else, to do right with you, and if I knew it would be doing right, as I rather suspect it would, to let you alone, I would do it." Further on in the same letter he says: "What I do wish is that our further acquaintance shall depend on yourself. If such further acquaintance would contribute nothing to your happiness I am sure it would not to mine. If you feel yourself in any degree bound to me, I am now willing to release you, provided you wish it, while on the other hand I am willing and even anxious to bind you faster, if I can be convinced that it will, in any considerable degree, add to your happiness. This, indeed, is the whole question with me. Nothing would make me more miserable than to believe you miserable—nothing more happy than to know you were so."

The foregoing extracts from the letters of Mr. Lincoln are referred to in this connection as demonstrating the correctness of the information which I obtained from my mother when talking to her on this subject. She said that while she admired him she did not entertain for him that feeling which would have justified her in accepting his offer, and that she and Mr. Lincoln were never in fact engaged to be married. She found great pleasure in his company but when the time came for a final decision she concluded, after an examination of her own heart, that it would not be right to tell him yes, and so she told him no.

B. R. VINEYARD.

ST. JOSEPH, MO., June 9, 1881.

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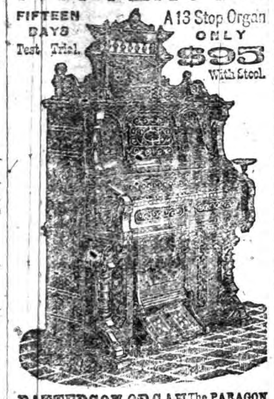
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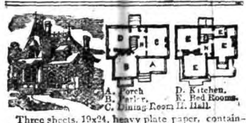

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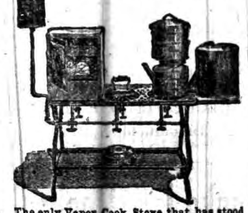
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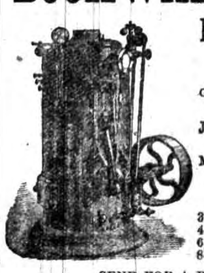
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